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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001062

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SUBJECT: PRO-CHAVEZ FORCES STILL DIVIDED (NOT JUST THE
OPPOSITION)

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Chavez and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) have been publicly feuding with small pro-government parties, such as Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the Communist Party (PCV), over the selection of consensus candidates for the November state and local elections. The PSUV is also confronting party dissidents who plan to run as independents in some states. Trying to ease the growing division between the PSUV and its allies, Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello announced late on July 29 that the PSUV and smaller pro-government parties have formed a technical commission to forge consensus on as many gubernatorial and mayoral candidacies as possible. Divisions among pro-government parties are quite similar to ongoing problems within the opposition, but are probably less damaging. All the pro-government parties still agree that Chavez is their "revolutionary leader," while the opposition continues to work through multiple, competing spokespersons. End Summary.

Chavez Chides His Allies

¶2. (C) During President Chavez's July 27 television broadcast of "Alo, Presidente," the Venezuelan president lashed out at the small pro-government parties, such as Patria Para Todos (PPT), the Communist Party (PCV), Lina Ron's Popular Unity of Venezuela (UPV) and the People's Electoral Movement (MEP). He faulted them for both declining to join his PSUV party in 2007 and for withholding support from PSUV candidates for November's state and local elections. He ordered PSUV Vice President Alberto Muller Rojas to reach consensus with these parties the week of July 27 or to break with the "Patriotic Alliance." Chavez also asserted that these "microparties" are in danger of disappearing, asserting that they command less than one percent of the vote.

PPT and PCV Reply

¶3. (C) PPT and PCV leaders held a joint July 28 press conference to defend their parties' respective negotiating positions with the PSUV. PPT leader Jose Albornoza noted that his party is supporting PSUV candidates in many races, but so far the PSUV is not supporting any PPT candidates. PPT and PCV leaders also noted that PSUV Vice President Muller Rojas

did not attend coalition planning meetings in recent weeks. They said that absent any agreement with the PSUV, they intended to press ahead with a combined total of over 250 candidates. All of the spokespersons of the small pro-Chavez parties have avoided criticizing Chavez directly, instead asserting publicly that PSUV party leaders have "misinformed" him of their positions.

Enter Diosdado Cabello

14. (C) Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello, a PSUV leader and candidate running for re-election, met with leaders of several small pro-government parties for four hours on July 29 and afterward announced that the PSUV and its allies reached agreement on PSUV gubernatorial candidates in nine states and the mayoral candidate for Caracas. The PSUV and allied parties also agreed to form a technical commission to try to reach agreement on as many more candidates as possible. Interestingly, Cabello and Caracas Mayoral candidate Aristobulo Isturiz will represent the PSUV on the technical commission, essentially replacing PSUV negotiator Muller Rojas, who continued to accuse the small pro-government parties of "blackmail" in comments to the local press.

15. (C) At the same time, the PSUV appears to be preparing to nominate only its candidates for the concurrent state assembly elections. Local PSUV organizations (battalions) are in the process of nominating 60 percent of the candidates. The PSUV is reportedly going to ask the PSUV's national coordination committee and regional committees to nominate the remaining 40 percent.

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Internal Dissidents

16. (C) The PSUV is having particular difficulties in states where the party bypassed the incumbent. For example, Carababo Governor Luis Acosta Carlez intends to run as an independent, even though the PSUV selected government television political talk show host Mario Silva to be the party's candidate. President Chavez declared Guarico Governor Eduardo Manuitt "a false revolutionary" and the PSUV expelled him in June. Manuitt rejected what he call the PSUV "imposition" of former Information Minister William Lara to be the party's gubernatorial candidate and backed his daughter's independent candidacy instead.

17. (C) The PSUV primary process in some cases exacerbated internal differences. The PSUV ratified victories only of PSUV pre-candidates who obtained over 50 percent of the vote or who beat their nearest opponent by more than 15 percent. In three states in which there was no clear winner according to the PSUV rules, President Chavez passed over the biggest vote-getter and chose a less popular candidate. National Assembly and unsuccessful PSUV pre-candidate for the Maracaibo mayorship Calixto Ortega told us that he believes the PSUV primary process yielded hard-line candidates that may be less attractive to the broader voting public.

Comment

18. (C) The very public spat between the PSUV and its allied parties presents an image of the pro-government parties that is very similar to the public image of the fractured opposition. In fact, the opposition has so far agreed on 13 consensus gubernatorial candidates to date, four more than the PSUV and its allies. Moreover, votes registered with small pro-government parties were the difference that carried

nine pro-government gubernatorial candidates into office in 2005. Nevertheless, the PSUV enjoys a significant electoral advantage in that it has a clear and charismatic leader in President Chavez, while the opposition continues to work through multiple spokespersons. In addition, Chavez has many more carrots and sticks at his disposal to try to forge pro-government unity before November.

DUDDY